

Preface

This plan concerns Rhode Island's landscape and the people who use the land, both today and in the future. It is also, more fundamentally, about choices. Rhode Islanders make thousands of individual choices each day that affect the land and that, collectively, are creating the landscape future Rhode Islanders will inhabit. The plan argues that these choices--whether small or large, individual or collective, economic or personal lifestyle--should be made consciously, responsibly, and with a clear vision of what the future landscape of Rhode Island *should* be. *A Greener Path* describes the direction where inertial decision-making is now taking our landscape and advances an alternative vision of the future landscape. It asks Rhode Islanders to *choose* a better destiny for the land they love.

The idea that Rhode Island should have a plan of this nature sprouted during the wave of growth and development that swept across Rhode Island's landscape in the mid-1980s. The real and threatened losses of important resource lands and cherished places during the development boom constituted an "open space crisis" which galvanized public opinion and set the stage for unparalleled action and investment: authorization of over \$100 million of bonds for public open space purchase, enactment of new state laws setting forth local comprehensive planning and zoning requirements, and a State decision to prepare an element of the State Guide Plan focused entirely upon open space.

A Greener Path begins with the presumption, in Part One, that critically important public values inherently reside in the state's landscape. It documents key natural and cultural values that Rhode Island's landscape provides to society and asserts that they are worth defending. Parts Two and Three provide an historical and contemporary review of human interaction with the Rhode Island landscape and define three land usage trends--consumption, fragmentation and resource endangerment--that threaten the integrity, resource security, and public availability of the future landscape. Part Four introduces the possibility that an alternative to the *status quo* exists and sets an expansive goal to move the state in a new direction. Part Five documents the analytical examination of the state's resources performed in the planning process and describes the method used to produce the recommended greenspace and greenways systems plan, which is presented in Part Six. Policies to guide state, local and private landscape-shaping actions in the direction of the new goal are set forth in Part Seven. The concluding Part Eight issues a challenge to a *crucial generation* of Rhode Islanders to create the recommended greenspace and greenways system, and outlines a 25 year program of implementation.

While the idea for a Greenspace and Greenways plan took root in the late 1980s, the seeds were sown much earlier. Over one hundred years ago--in 1893--the Public Parks Association began a tradition of planning and advocacy in behalf of land preservation and adequate space for public recreation. In the subsequent decade, the Metropolitan Park Commission was created by the General Assembly, beginning Rhode Island State government's involvement in park system development. While broader in geographic scope than the Metropolitan Park Commission's landmark 1903 Plan, *A Greener Path* is a direct descendant in spirit of the Commission's

pioneering efforts, and of the many like-minded studies, reports and plans that followed through the decades.

As many of its predecessor studies have done, *A Greener Path* throws down the gauntlet for Rhode Islanders to take charge of the physical destiny of their state. It challenges our leaders to have the vision to see beyond the present hard times and the courage to ask us to invest in our state's future. It challenges private owners of greenspace tracts to recognize the legitimacy of the public's interest in their property, and to be receptive to innovative ways in which their objectives and goals for the land can be best harmonized with protection of the essential values it holds. It challenges builders, developers, and realtors to not see the plan just as a further "locking up" of their raw material, but as a key first step to forging partnerships for the growth of quality communities in which all can prosper. It challenges local governments to be bold in their prescriptions for quality growth and receptive to novel land management tools. It challenges environmentalists to come to consensus on what is truly essential, and to be forthright about where the growth and development we need should go. Finally, it challenges all citizens of Rhode Island to think about the future in a positive sense; to see clearly what is, while envisioning what could be, and to take the risks and make the sacrifices needed to get from here to there.

The path of land conservation in Rhode Island has been a long journey, characterized by incremental progress and fluctuating public interest and commitment. Today, there are encouraging signs that the deep concern that Rhode Islanders have for their environment and landscape is inspiring a new wave of activism and involvement. Even in these difficult times, and with few resources, Rhode Islanders across the state are coming together in small and large groups to find innovative ways to care for the land and water they love. Local greenway groups, pond and river watchers, watershed associations, land trusts are active in virtually all Rhode Island communities. They are giving their time, investing themselves, in cleaning river and shorefronts, creating trails, and planning greenways. This is a dramatic and manifestly hopeful development, and an excellent first step down *a greener path*.

Adoption

A Greener Path: Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future was adopted as State Guide Plan Element 155 by the State Planning Council on November 10, 1994, following a public hearing conducted on November 3, 1994. Amendments to adopted State Guide Plan elements are made periodically to report progress, incorporate new data, revise policies, and update recommendations. All proposed amendments are reviewed by the State Planning Council in accordance with its adopted *Rules of Procedure*, and are presented for public comment at a public hearing prior to action by the Council.

Acknowledgements

As in any undertaking of the scope of this plan, *A Greener Path* represents a sum of the energy, creativity, and knowledge contributed by numerous individuals and groups. Among those who must share in any credit which this completed work may receive are: past Rhode Island Department Directors Frederick Lippitt (Administration), Robert Bendick (Environmental Management), and W. Edward Wood (Transportation), who were early advocates for a state open space protection plan and greenways; Judith Benedict, who, at the Department of Environmental Management and later with The Nature Conservancy, was an important friend and patient advisor to this undertaking; and Keith Lewis (Rhode Island's first representative of The Conservation Fund), Colgate Searle of the RI School of Design, and Brown University's Harold Ward (founder of Green Rhode Island) who all championed and assisted the state's entry into greenway planning.

If the ideas advanced in this plan bear fruit, these individuals, together with the Division of Planning's Daniel Varin, with whom the vision of a State Greenspace and Greenways Guide Plan originated, will be remembered as sowing the first seeds of Rhode Island's modern greenways movement.

A Greener Path was prepared by George W. Johnson, Principal Planner, who directed the planning process and wrote the plan, and Steven Sawyer, Senior Environmental Planner, who performed the computerized geographic analysis and composed the plan's maps. Messrs. Johnson and Sawyer were guided in these tasks by Susan Morrison, Chief of Systems Planning; Victor Parmentier, Supervising Planner; and John Stachelhaus, RIGIS Coordinator. Mr. Stachelhaus and Mark Vincent, Senior Environmental Planner (resigned 1992), performed some of the geographic analyses completed early in the planning process.

Many others lent their time and advice to this endeavor, often helping more than they might have realized in moving the project along its long, and often technically-torturous, path towards completion. In addition to Advisory Committee members and alternates listed on pages vi-vii, those to whom the author owes a debt of gratitude include student interns--Jennifer Airolti, Curt Belavance, Denis Lafaille, Fred Preseley, and Michael Veracka, who all toiled long hours for little or no reward--save for knowledge gained and their faith in the future--and numerous colleagues who gladly offered advice, access to data, constructive criticism, and other support throughout the project. While any listing risks omissions, these professionals include:

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The Rhode Island Geographic Information System (RIGIS), a computerized spatial database developed and maintained by the University of Rhode Island's Environmental Data Center and

cooperating State agencies, afforded the greenspace and greenways planning process the most comprehensive and current geographically-referenced statewide resource data.

The project's geographic analysis was performed using ARC/INFO software packages licensed to the Division by Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. of Redlands, CA. Various portions of the analysis were performed on the Division of Planning's SUN/Sparc2 workstation, SUN 386i workstation and Computopia 386/25PC computers.

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Comments on *A Greener Path* are welcomed. Contact George Johnson at (401) 277-6479 or write to the R.I. Division of Planning, One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI 02908-5872.



